

O 201021Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9417
INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY DHAKA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMCONSUL CHENNAI
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USEU BRUSSELS
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USMISSION GENEVA
HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
DIA WASHINGTON DC
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
SECDEF WASHDC
CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI//APCW/APOP//
CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000186

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER, CAMP), SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN)
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)
ATHENS FOR PCARTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA AND POL (SBERRY)
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 17

Ref: A) Colombo 180, B)Colombo 173, C) Colombo 166, D) Colombo
157, E) Colombo 152, F) Colombo 149, G) Colombo 148, H) Colombo
145, I) Colombo 140, J) Colombo 138

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On February 20, the Defense Secretary told the Ambassador that the army expects to push the remaining LTTE back to the safe zone within the next week (February 21-27). He assured the Ambassador that the Government would at that point enter "passive mode" to permit civilians to flee. He pledged the Government would continue to coordinate on providing food and medicine to trapped civilians. IDP arrivals tapered off during the week of February 15-20 but are expected to surge again. The ongoing visit of UN Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes continued to receive prominent news coverage in the Sri Lankan press. End summary.

Defense Secretary Details Plan for Safe Zone

¶2. (SBU) In a February 20 meeting, Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa told Ambassador that the Sri Lankan military is continuing to battle in Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK) city. The military has cleared the south and west portions of the city, and are now pushing back forces in the east part of the city. The Defense Secretary noted they expect the city will be cleared in about a week (by February 27). Following this operation, the military will move in short order to occupy all land surrounding the safe zone. The military is already close to the south end of the safe zone, and approaching from Chalai town in the north. The Defense Secretary assured the Ambassador that once the military surrounds the safe zone, the military will go into "passive mode", withholding fire into the safe zone. The military does not believe the LTTE has enough remaining cadres to patrol the borders of the 12x2 kilometer safe zone, and

civilians will be able to flee into Government-controlled territory.

While civilians are fleeing, the Defense Secretary stated that the military "is prepared to wait". The Defense Secretary reiterated that the Government will continue to facilitate food and medical supply shipments into the safe zone, and evacuation of sick and wounded out.

UN, NGOs Expect Outflow

13. (U) The number of IDPs leaving the conflict zone has tapered off from thousands per day during the week of February 8-14, to several hundred per day during the week of February 15-20. However, humanitarian agencies anticipate a major outflow in the coming days and weeks. UNHCR reports that 34,241 recent IDPs from the conflict are now in seventeen Government-appointed IDP sites in Mannar, Vavuniya, and Jaffna. Neither ICRC nor UNHCR have access to monitor the Government's registration of IDPs. Embassy will continue to press Government officials to permit such monitoring.

14. (U) UN and United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) report improved access for humanitarian agencies to provide assistance in the seventeen IDP sites. UMCOR reports that food and non-food relief items needs of IDPs are being met, and IDPs receive an adequate water supply; however shelter and sanitation conditions require additional improvement.

Mullaitivu Update

15. (U) An ICRC-flagged vessel ferried 30 MT of food aid to the safe zone on February 18 and returned empty. A new ICRC medical evacuation by sea for 400 persons is taking place on February 20 (Ref A) on a vessel which transported medical supplies and 10-15 MT of food into the safe zone. Of the 1212 persons evacuated in the prior three evacuation operations, over 400 are still being treated in hospitals, and approximately 700 have been transferred to Vavuniya. World Concern reports that severe trauma cases are being sent to Kandy Hospital, as the hospital in Trincomalee is at capacity.

16. (SBU) The UN World Food Program is negotiating with the Government on use of two tugboats to transport food to the safe zone on an ongoing basis, which would enable shipments totaling 250 - 300 MTs per week. As has been the case throughout the conflict, much of the food will be USAID Title II food aid.

UN U/SYG Holmes Visit

17. (SBU) UN U/SYG for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Sir John Holmes began a three day visit to Sri Lanka on February 19. Holmes traveled to Vavuniya on February 20 to meet with NGOs providing direct assistance and to view IDP camps. His visit is receiving front billing in Sri Lankan papers and news reports. Holmes commended the Government's efforts to deliver food aid to civilians trapped in the conflict area, and called on both the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to ensure safety of civilians in the safe zone.

Reported Civilian Casualties

18. (SBU) Tamil sources from within the LTTE-controlled area claim 46 civilians killed and 108 injured on February 19. Reportedly, no persons reached Government-controlled territory on February 19. (Note: Such reports from Tamil sources cannot be confirmed and are frequently exaggerated.)

BLAKE